

Message Text

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ACTION EB-11

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9590

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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SUBJ: CIVAIR - SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES REEQUIPMENT

REF: DAMASCUS 1486; ABU DHABI 1007; BEIRUT 8585

SUMMARY: US PROSPECTS FOR SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES ORDER
THREE WIDEBODIED AIRCRAFT STILL ALIVE, WITH LOCKHEED-
CALIFORNIA REPORTS FROM LOCAL SYRIAN CONSULTANT THAT
PRES ASSAD APPEARS TO HAVE SELECTED TRISTAR AS
PRIME CHOICE FOR HIS AIRLINE. LOCKHEED-CALIF
OFFICIALS PRES DUANE WOOD AND REG SALES MANAGER
GEORGE LOMBARD SEEK APPOINTMENT PRES ASSAD AND ARE
SOLICITING EMBASSY DAMASCUS ASSISTANCE IN ARRANGING
APPOINTMENT. SUBJECT TO EMBASSY DAMASCUS CONCURRENCE,
RCAA BELIEVES VISIT MAY BE TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE,
PARTICULARLY TO COUNTER FRENCH PUSH BEHALF A300B4 AND
SINCE ORDER THREE TRISTARS REPRESENTS \$87 MILLION SALE.
END SUMMARY.

1. GEORGE LOMBARD, LOCKHEED-CALIF REP COVERING SYRIAN ARAB
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AIRLINES, INFORMS US OF SERIES OF MEETINGS BEIRUT AND LONDON

INVOLVING LOMBARD, UAE AMBASSADOR TO UK MAHDI TAJER, AND WITHIN LAST SEVERAL DAYS, LOCKHEED-CALIF PRES DUANE WOOD. IN APPARENT SHIFT OF POSITION, TAJER IS NOW ALLEGEDLY EMPHATIC IN STATING THAT IN HIS VIEW LOCKHEED TRISTAR, ALTHOUGH MORE EXPENSIVE THAN A300B4, IS BY FAR THE SUPERIOR AND MORE VERSATILE AIRCRAFT. HE INITIALLY INDICATED TO LOCKHEED THAT SARG PRES, HAFEZ ASSAD, ALSO SHARES VIEW TRISTAR SUPERIOR AIRCRAFT. HOWEVER, IN A LATER AUG 10 MEETING, HE SHIFTED SOMEWHAT BY DECLARING THAT LOCKHEED SHOULD SEEK FIRM ASSURANCE FROM PRES ASSAD AND AIRLINE THAT TRISTAR IS AIRCRAFT SYRIANS WANT, AND THAT IF THIS CLEARLY CONVEYED BY PRES ASSAD TO MAHDI TAJER (EXECUTOR OF UAE GRANT COVERING THE THREE AIRCRAFT), THAT LETTER-OF-CREDIT WOULD BE ISSUED BY TAJER IN FAVOR OF LOCKHEED-CALIF AS EARLY AS THIS COMING FRIDAY.

2. CONFUSING LOMBARD AND WOOD, HOWEVER, IS THEIR LOCAL CONSULTANT'S REPORT OF PRIVATE MEETING WITH PRES ASSAD LAST WEEK WHEREIN PRES FLATLY STATED HE WANTED THE TRISTAR FOR THE AIRLINE AND THAT HE HAD CONVEYED THIS CLEARLY TO MAHDI TAJER. PRES REPORTEDLY STATED THAT IF TAJER DID NOT CONVEY THIS VIEW TO LOCKHEED, ABU DHABI ATTACHING STRINGS TO GRANT AND PERHAPS PREFERRED A300B4.

3. TO CLARIFY ALL THIS, WOOD AND LOMBARD DESIROUS OF PERSONALLY CALLING ON PRES ASSAD TO ASCERTAIN HIS EQUIPMENT CHOICE FOR THE AIRLINE. THUS, IF ASSAD REPEATS THAT TRISTAR IS AIRCRAFT SELECTED, LOMBARD CAN PIN TAJER DOWN ON PRES'S STATEMENT AND PERHAPS VALUABLE ORDER WORTH \$87 MILLION TO US AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY WOULD SHORTLY FOLLOW. RCAA UNDERSTANDS EMBASSY DAMASCUS ASKINGDEPT GUIDANCE ON WHETHER OR NOT TO REQUEST, THROUGH SARG FOREIGN MINISTRY, CALL ON PRES ASSAD BY LOMBARD AND WOOD. IN VIEW OF IMPORTANCE OF THIS ORDER TO OUR AIRCRAFT SALES ASPIRATIONS IN AREA, AND CRITICAL PERIOD AHEAD IN MAKING OR BREAKING THESE ASPIRATIONS IN SYRIA, RCAA BELIEVES SUCH A CALL BY LOCKHEED-CALIF WOULD BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL. PARENTHETICALLY, RCAA UNDERSTANDS AIRBUS INDUSTRIE ADVOCATE (AEROSPATIALE) HAS MADE SEVERAL JOINT CALLS WITH FRENCH AMBASSADOR ON PRES ASSAD BEHALF A300B4 WITHIN PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. CONFIDENTIAL

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4. ALTHOUGH THEORETICALLY MCDONNELL DOUGLAS AND BOEING STILL PURSUING SYRIAN ARAB SALE, RCAA NOW BELIEVES TRISTAR REPRESENTS OUR BEST CHANCE TO SECURE US ORDER. FURTHER, NEITHER BOEING NOR MCDONNELL DOUGLAS HAVE REQUESTED OUR ASSISTANCE TO FACILITATE VISIT PRES ASSAD BUT, IF THEY DO, WE COULD PRESUMABLY HANDLE IN SAME MANNER AS LOCKHEED-CALIF REQUEST. RCAA PLEASED

APPARENTLY FAVORABLE REACTION TO TRISTAR BY MAHDI TAJER,
BUT WORRIED ABOUT HIS APPARENT RELUCTANCE TO CLEARLY
CONVEY, TO LOCKHEED, PRES ASSAD'S REPORTED SELECTION
TRISTAR. THEREFORE, CALL ON PRES ASSAD APPEARS PRACTICAL
NECESSITY TO CLEAR AIR.
GODLEY

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